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AUTHOR Kirshenbaum, Karen

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ABSTRACT

Noting that many early childhood practitioners have difficulty understanding and articulating how developmentally appropriate practices in their programs contribute to students' kindergarten readiness, this report details the implementation and evaluation of practicum experiences designed to improve preschool teachers' developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) so they could better prepare preschoolers for kindergarten readiness. Participating were 20 teachers at a military child development center in the western United States. The following practicum experiences were implemented by the training and curriculum specialist: (1) six teacher training sessions on child development and other areas; (2) parent-education opportunities; (3) bimonthly classroom visits; and (4) evaluation of classroom environments. Expected outcomes for the teachers related to providing children with DAP, arranging the classroom environments to meet children's interests and needs, explaining to others and demonstrating DAP, as well as including parent participation activities in the curriculum and explaining to parents how their participation promotes their children's development. Analysis of the data revealed that with the use of training sessions, parent-involvement opportunities, classroom-environment evaluations, and classroom visits, preschool teachers were able to prepare the students for kindergarten. The practicum report concludes with recommendations for improving DAP in the preschool classroom and plans for dissemination. Six appendices include the Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire, classroom observation instrument, a resource list, and the Kindergarten Readiness Parent Handbook. (Contains 47 references.) (KB)

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Helping Preschool Teachers Implement Developmentally Appropriate Child Care Practices Utilizing a 4-Point Strategy to Prepare Preschoolers for Kindergarten Readiness

by
Karen Kirshenbaum
Cluster 89

A Practicum II Report Presented to
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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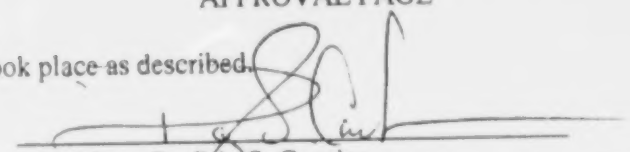

Verifier: Porfirio S. Canales

Chief, Family Member Programs Flight
Title

Colorado Springs, Colorado
Address

July 31, 2000
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Karen Kirshenbaum under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

Date of Final Approval of Report

Roberta Silfen, Ed.D., Adviser

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From start to finish, my husband Jason and daughters Emily and Melissa were there for me. With the deepest of gratitude and love, I dedicate this practicum to my family. They continue to encourage me to pursue my dreams and to do good things for children and families.

Abstract

Helping Preschool Teachers Implement Developmentally Appropriate Child Care Practices Utilizing a 4-Point Strategy to Prepare Preschoolers for Kindergarten Readiness. Kirshenbaum, Karen, 2000: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Child Care/Developmentally Appropriate Practice/Early Childhood/Preschool Development.

This practicum was developed to improve preschool teachers' developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) so they could better prepare preschoolers for kindergarten readiness. Teachers were to plan and implement a DAP curriculum, set up enriched environments, vary instructional techniques, and involve parents in the classrooms.

The writer presented six training sessions, offered parent-education opportunities, and evaluated classroom environments. Bimonthly classroom visits were also conducted.

Analysis of the data revealed that with the use of training sessions, parent-involvement opportunities, classroom-environment evaluations, and classroom visits, preschool teachers were able to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten readiness. Networking was also enhanced.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The setting for the practicum was a military base located in the western United States. The terrain was mountainous with a mean elevation of 6,035 feet. The climate was generally sunny with annual average humidity at 49%.

The city's population was 515,872, with 71% of this population younger than 44 years of age (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). The ethnicity was 78.9% White, 9.6% Hispanic, 7.5% Black, and 3.3% Asian (Gaquin & Hall, 1997).

Writer's Work Setting

The mission of the military child development center was to provide affordable, quality child care to military active-duty personnel. This quality child-care service allowed military personnel to perform their military functions and ensured that military readiness was maintained to protect our country without worrying about the well-being of their family members.

There were many unique features at this military base. This military base was a headquarters command with two child development centers and one youth center. There were four full-day preschool rooms at the main child development center, two preschool rooms at the child development annex and four preschool part-day classes held at the youth center. The full-day preschool programs ran Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day; the part-day program ran for 2 ½ hours on either a Monday, Wednesday, Friday morning or afternoon schedule or a Tuesday and Thursday morning or afternoon schedule. The total number of 3- to 5-year-old preschoolers that can be enrolled in the full-day program were 136. The total number of 3- to 5-year-old preschoolers that can enroll in the part-day program were 48. The 20 teachers consisted

of women who were married to active-duty military men and to retired military enlisted men, of married women whose spouses had no affiliation with the military, and of single women. Their mean age was 35 years. The ethnicity breakdown was 9 White, 6 Black, 3 Hispanic, 1 Asian and 1 Native American. The military population, in which these teachers belong, was a microcosm of the city population in terms of age and ethnicity. These military enlisted and officer personnel looked first to the base for child-care support.

Writer's Role

As the training and curriculum specialist assigned to these programs, the writer was responsible for providing training and curriculum support to two directors, three assistant directors, and teachers. Specifically, the writer provided oversight in the areas of setting up classroom physical environments, and of planning and implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum plans. She also provided oversight regarding the (a) use of developmentally appropriate instructional techniques for interacting with children, and (b) involvement and education of parents in their preschoolers' child-care experience. The writer ensured that classrooms were in compliance with the Department of Defense child development center inspection criteria and the National Association for the Education of Young Children developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) guidelines.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that the military teachers were having difficulty understanding how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. Although the teachers ensured that children have a safe and nurturing environment to explore and learn, they were not comprehending and articulating to others what were the best practices needed to support each preschooler's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth and development in their classroom settings.

Problem Description

The teachers were following a consistent daily activity schedule and were offering to children age-appropriate activities each day. These activities were reflected on weekly lesson plans, but many teachers found it difficult to understand and communicate to others what social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical skills were learned through these activities. In spite of their limited knowledge of child growth and development, the teachers were providing a variety of experiences in creativity (dramatic play, sand and water play, music, creative movement and art), and literacy (listening games, flannelboard stories, and books). There was also a balance of both active and quiet activities conducted indoors and outdoors. It was clear that the teachers were motivated to learn and grow as early childhood professionals. What were missing were the right tools to better understand and articulate why they do what they do and how DAP focuses on the individual needs and interests of children and how it encourages learning.

The writer had observed developmentally appropriate activities being initiated by preschoolers throughout the classrooms' interest centers. Toys and materials were placed on low shelves and corresponded to the supplies needed for that week's lesson plan.

Teachers were routinely changing the physical environments and rotating toys, but they did not know what skills were learned through manipulating these concrete objects prominently displayed on labeled shelves.

Consistently, teachers supervised their children as they engaged in play in these interest centers. Sometimes these teachers participated in their children's play, while at other times they observed children or directed their play. In spite of their appropriate staff-child interactions, teachers were unable to identify the instructional techniques they were using and why these varied instructional techniques supported children's learning. It was evident that confusion also existed with defining the difference between curriculum and instruction.

With all the pressures of balancing work, family, and outside activities such as school or a second job, many of the military parents did not have the freedom to actively participate in their child's classroom activities. In no way did this mean that they did not want to be involved, but the traditional route of visiting the classroom to read a book or have a snack with their child just did not fit in with the demands of their respective jobs. Teachers were finding that attendance at their monthly parent activities was low and that they needed to find more innovative ways to partner with parents.

In addition to parent-involvement activities, teachers recognized that parents wanted to be sure that their preschoolers were ready for kindergarten. Many of the parents asked teachers why they did not teach the alphabet; the majority of teachers responded by saying that they were not allowed to do so, or they referred these parents to the writer for a more in-depth explanation. These observations indicated that the teachers were not confident in their abilities to discuss DAP or they did not fully understand what DAP was and how it led to kindergarten readiness or both reasons applied.

It was with DAP or which personnel needed to concentrate more attention. Teachers wanted to move from simply going through the daily actions of doing age-appropriate activities to understanding why DAP was being implemented. They wanted to be able to communicate to others how DAP helped children learn and grow and prepared them for entrance into kindergarten. Ultimately, teachers wanted to provide the highest quality developmental child-care programs for their children.

Problem Documentation

In June 1999, the writer distributed a kindergarten readiness questionnaire (see Appendix A) to the 20 teachers. All 20 teachers participated in this voluntary questionnaire process. The questionnaire asked participants to document in writing their responses to questions in four categories of curriculum planning: DAP activities, teaching instruction, classroom environments, and parent involvement. The results of this questionnaire indicated the following:

1. Ten of the 20 teachers were not able to explain how the DAP activities that they listed promoted children's development.

2. Eight of the 20 teachers were not able to explain what children learn using materials in the interest centers.

3. Ten of the 20 teachers did not understand the difference between curriculum (what we teach) and instruction (how we teach).

4. Nine of the 20 teachers were not able to explain how parent involvement promotes children's growth and development.

Data were collected from questionnaire results. Specific information gathered from this questionnaire's results revealed that teachers could list DAP activities, yet explaining what children learn when implementing developmentally appropriate activities in the

areas of cognitive and emotional development presented the greatest challenge for them.

Results indicated that teachers had the most difficulty explaining their teaching instruction techniques when conducting small-group time. While 10 of the 20 teachers did not understand the difference between curriculum (what we teach) and instruction (how we teach), 6 of the 20 teachers understood teaching instruction techniques during small-group times.

Regarding the set up of classroom environments, results indicated that teachers could list the materials in the learning centers, but were not able to explain what children learn using these materials in these interest centers. Teachers had the most difficulty explaining the learning that occurs in the writing, block, and music centers. Here 9, 10, and 10 teachers, respectively, were not able to explain what children learn using the materials in the writing, block, and music interest centers.

Listing parent involvement and sharing activities, such as the listing of developmentally appropriate activities and materials found in interest centers, was also relatively easy for the teachers. Yet, explaining how these listed activities promoted children's growth and development continued to be a reoccurring problem.

In addition to answering questions, teachers were given the opportunity to write comments to further explain their responses to the questionnaire. Only three teachers wrote comments regarding this questionnaire. One responded with, "Wow, I did it." She also drew a happy face. The second teacher wrote, " This was a lot of work." The third teacher commented, "This was very stressful and I don't like it."

Causative Analysis

Focusing first on training sessions covering the topic of developmentally appropriate activities for preschoolers, a review of the writer's 1998-1999 training

calendar revealed that training sessions covered only general information on creative, language, and cognitive hands-on activities for preschoolers. Further examination of the teachers' training files substantiated the content areas covered in past training sessions. Indeed, teachers received a multitude of developmentally appropriate hands-on activities to do in their classrooms, yet they were not receiving the theoretical and research foundations to explain why these activities were done and what children learned from them.

A second cause identified during the investigation was that classroom environments were set up into interest centers, but these environments had not been evaluated to assess how the materials and equipment in these interest centers promoted children's growth and development. The writer reviewed the teachers' training files and discovered that there was no documentation of attendance at any classroom evaluation training. Searching through these files also revealed that there was an absence of any classroom-environment evaluation tools. The lack of any training or tools clearly confirmed that, although the classroom environments were set up in interest centers, teachers did not have a sound understanding of what supplies and materials were required in these centers. Furthermore, without obtaining a strong knowledge base in assessing classroom environments, teachers did not know what children learned in these interest centers.

Turning attention to the writer's role in these classrooms, it was evident that the writer's classroom visits were primarily limited to observing teachers and assessing whether they were able to apply the early childhood concepts learned from the military training modules into their everyday teaching practices. A comprehensive look into the writer's day planner from fiscal year 1998-1999 identified the specific dates when she

visited the classrooms. This investigation revealed how little time was actually spent in the classroom for role-modeling appropriate staff-child interactions. In all, the writer visited the classrooms on an average of only once a month. To further investigate these limited classroom visits, the writer reviewed her June 1999 work-duties survey and realized that the majority of her work time consisted of doing monthly observations on new employees and module competency visits, with little time devoted to role-modeling DAP in the classrooms. Without a doubt, these limited visits to teachers' classrooms were not adequate for supporting teachers' understanding and communication of how DAP led to kindergarten readiness.

The final cause identified during the investigation was that teachers were not consistently planning parent-involvement activities and educating parents on how children learned through DAP. An inspection of curriculum plans from October 1998 to August 1999 indicated that, on average, parent-involvement activities were planned only once per month. In addition to checking curriculum plans, the writer reviewed the annual parent-education calendar and noted that only three training sessions were presented to parents, and none were on how children learn. This data definitely highlighted that more work was needed to involve parents in their children's learning experience and to educate parents about how children learn through DAP.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Many problems related to the writer's situation surfaced during the literature review. An overview follows of the inherent problems faced when teachers are having difficulty understanding and communicating how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. The first insight from the literature review was that teachers are uncertain about their abilities to implement DAP in their classrooms. Dunn and Kontos (1997) addressed the

growing concern that statistically only one-third of child development center classrooms truly practiced DAP. They wrote that while many teachers believe in DAP, they do not know how to apply DAP concepts into good teaching practices. Similarly, the military teachers wanted to prepare children for kindergarten, but they did not understand how to teach prereading, prewriting, and premath skills in a developmentally appropriate manner. Consequently, the teachable moments were often discarded due to the uncertainty of how to apply DAP to literacy learning. This gap between knowledge and application was further supported by Gronlund's (1995) observation that teachers are not sure about how to write developmentally appropriate lesson plans.

Do teachers come to their classrooms with an understanding of how young children learn and how to make schools ready? Instead of putting the responsibility of school readiness on the child, schools need to be ready to receive each child and to understand the way children learn. The Atlanta Southern Regional Education Board (1994) recognized that effective preschool programs are aware that children learn through hands-on sensory experiences rather than through a traditional academic-centered instructional approach. Jones (1997) also recognized how children learn and explained that teachers need to plan DAP activities that address the whole child's development--socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. It is very important to introduce the entire activity before breaking it up into its individual steps. For example, a child needs to first examine a completed puzzle before taking it apart and then putting it back together again. Clearly, schools and teachers are not solely responsible for children's learning. Involving parents in preschool programs also helps them to better understand their children's growth and development and build partnerships with teachers.

The literature detailed more supportive evidence of the profound problem teachers

were having with understanding and communicating the benefits of DAP to school readiness. Early childhood educators were confused about how to implement a developmentally age-appropriate and individually appropriate curriculum to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten readiness. Based on Schweinhart and Weikart's (1998) High Scope Preschool curriculum comparison longitudinal study, early childhood education needs to move beyond focusing on teaching cognitive academic reading and writing skills in preparation for kindergarten to supporting children's development of prosocial and reasoning skills. Belsky and MacKinnon (1994) reported that success in kindergarten requires more than scrutinizing and assessing children's intelligence. The child's social and thinking processes also need to be addressed. In addition to a whole-child focus, according to Burrell and Permutter (1995), implementation of DAP in the primary schools also addressed the debate dealing with the balance between child-initiated and teacher-directed activities.

While teachers may believe in DAP, there was evidence that they did not consistently implement DAP in their classrooms. McMullen (1999) stated that teachers acknowledged DAP, because as early childhood educators it was the politically right thing to accept, yet they did not practice what they preached. Furthermore, these ineffective teachers had no idea that their poor instructional practices could negatively impact children's learning and development. O'Brien (1996) found that Head Start teachers communicated a preference for an individual, child-centered model; however, the daily activity schedule was primarily academic oriented, with half the planned activities being teacher directed. Kostelnik (1993) found that center directors were confused about the definition of DAP and that they desperately wanted to comprehend the steps that were required to reach the goal of DAP implementation. This confusion

about DAP was not isolated to teachers; it prevailed among many of the preschool stakeholders, including parents and the community at large.

A review of possible causes of the problem of implementing DAP in early childhood settings indicated that parent attitudes about learning through play affected the teacher's ability to defend play as a positive teaching strategy. Brewer and Kieff (1997) stated that, when parents express concern over what their children learn through play, teachers often abandon the amount of play activity in their classrooms. According to McMullen (1999), teachers were hesitant to or did not practice DAP because they perceived a lack of support from the child center's administration, from families, and from early childhood peers. In essence, Bridges (1996) pinpointed that preschoolers will not demonstrate kindergarten readiness when parents are set against DAP and only support inappropriate academic practices.

Parental pressure to emphasize academics was compounded by the fact that many teachers were resistant to implementing DAP because they, like their parental customers, were accustomed to a more traditional academic approach (Riedinger, 1997). Passidomo (1994) found that changing instructional practices was difficult for teachers, especially for those who thought their traditional methods were still effective teaching strategies. Dunn and Kontos (1997) related this resistance to DAP as a conflict between teachers' educational philosophy and their instructional techniques. Teachers talked about the importance of child-initiated instruction, but their practices were didactic.

A change to DAP was perceived by many teachers as difficult. McMullen (1999) espoused that teachers felt that an academic approach, rather than practicing DAP, was necessary because instruction must be directed to meeting specific standards and skills. Graue (1998) agreed that teachers frequently view their mission as teaching to the whole

class and meeting school standards and expectations, instead of directing their energies to individualize their teaching instruction to meet the needs of each child.

This DAP resistance was further aggravated by teachers' limited education and professional development training. Gronlund (1995) wrote that teachers' questions evidenced a need for skills in setting up and managing a DAP classroom. In a study of two Russian preschools, Kiger (1999) addressed the direct correlation between training and teacher confidence in communicating the needs of preschoolers. Without this professional development, these Russian teachers would not share, with any degree of confidence, information concerning their preschoolers' development. Early childhood teachers require no more than a high school degree, and in most cases no standardized training prerequisites before assuming these caregiving duties (see International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998, for complete data). Teachers in military child development programs may also secure a job with only a high school degree and with no professional early childhood knowledge or previous child-care experience.

With no job knowledge or previous child-care experience required, it was not surprising that teachers were confused with what DAP is and how to implement it. Teachers are fixated on analyzing the fine points of DAP rather than understanding that DAP is rooted in understanding what practices are best to help children learn and grow. DAP is not a curriculum, but a rational and positive approach to interacting with young children (Kostelnik, 1993; Monroe & Vander Wilt, 1998).

Clearly, the writer's literature review recognized that teachers needed guidance, support, and education in both why and how to implement DAP in their classrooms. In a 1995 cost, quality, and child outcomes study, a need was found for additional

professional development for teachers with a training emphasis placed on understanding and communicating why DAP leads to kindergarten readiness (Cryer & Phillipsen, 1997). First, teachers need to understand child growth and development and to grasp DAP ideology. Only then can they meet the challenge of putting early childhood theory into their everyday teaching practices (Chen, 1998; Wien, 1995).

Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) addressed the same concerns shared by military teachers concerning what is developmentally appropriate instruction and whether teachers can teach using DAP. Teachers needed more guidance to clearly understand the differences between instruction and curriculum so they can successfully implement DAP in their classroom environments. With this clarification, teachers can then focus their attention on DAP implementation in their classroom settings. Colker, Koralek, and Dodge (1995) identified classroom environments that may need to be evaluated when children have difficulty making choices and getting involved in any one activity. Instead, these children just move aimlessly from one interest center to another. The teachers in the military child-care program were also puzzled and frustrated with how to minimize these inappropriate behaviors and maximize learning in their classroom settings.

Miller (1996) found that outside classroom influences also affected DAP implementation. Teachers, to include those in the military child-care setting, addressed the problem of involving parents in a parent-teacher partnership. Lacking experience on parent-teacher partnerships, teachers have not surveyed parents as to how they would like to be involved and what are their traditions. They have not consistently included involvement activities on their curriculum plans. More guidance is needed as to how to form these partnerships. Teachers will not be successful in DAP implementation without parental support and involvement.

The scope of the writer's literature review was limited to researching the early childhood developmentally appropriate practices of center caregivers and teachers who work with children from toddlers to primary grades. This review identified that early childhood programs are moving in the direction of DAP. Yet, there still was confusion as to how to plan curriculum that was both age and individually appropriate and balance child-initiated and teacher-directed instructional practices. There was also confusion about how to set up and explain what children learn in their classroom environments, and why teachers can involve parents in their children's classroom experiences.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The goal for this practicum was that the military preschool teachers would care for their children using the best practices available for supporting children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth and development. They would also be able to communicate how their curriculum and instructional approaches prepared children for kindergarten readiness.

Teachers would set up classroom environments with age-appropriate toys and equipment displayed on labeled shelves. They would use a balance of teacher and child-initiated instructional techniques as they implemented developmentally appropriate activities within these centers that encouraged children's exploration and problem solving. Recognizing the important role that parents play in their children's lives, these teachers would also find ways to involve parents in their preschooler's daily activities and educate them on how and what children learn through play and how DAP prepares children for kindergarten readiness.

Expected Outcomes

The writer had set four expected outcomes to address teachers' minimal understanding and difficulty with communicating how implementing developmentally appropriate activities and enriching classroom environments leads to kindergarten readiness. These outcomes also addressed how demonstrating developmentally appropriate instructional techniques and involving and educating parents promoted children's development and readiness for kindergarten. The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. Sixteen of the 20 teachers will provide children with developmentally

appropriate activities on a daily basis and understand how these activities promote children's development.

2. Sixteen of the 20 teachers will set up their classroom environments to meet the interests and needs of children in their care and understand how these materials promoted children's learning.

3. Sixteen of the 20 teachers will be able to explain to others and demonstrate developmentally appropriate instructional techniques during their interactions with children in their care.

4. Sixteen of the 20 teachers will include parent-involvement activities into their curriculum and be able to explain to parents how parent participation promotes their children's growth and development.

Measurement of Outcomes

Each projected outcome was measured using the Kindergarten Readiness Developmentally Appropriate Practices Classroom Observation Tool (see Appendix B). This tool was divided into four sections, developmentally appropriate activities, classroom environments, instructional techniques, and parent involvement. Under the category developmentally appropriate activities, the writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrating 16 of the 20 developmentally appropriate activity behaviors listed. Next, under the category of classroom environments, the writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrating three of the four environment behaviors listed. For the category instructional techniques, the writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrating four of the five listed instructional behaviors. Lastly under the fourth category, parent involvement, the writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrating four of the five parent-involvement behaviors. The observation

tool had a place to record both observations and an assessment of whether the specific behavior was or was not observed.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that the military preschool teachers were having difficulty understanding how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. Teachers were not comprehending and articulating to others what are the best practices needed to support each preschooler's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth and development in their classroom settings.

Keeping this problem in mind, the following were solutions gleaned from the literature. The writer could use the same curriculum in the preschool classes as was used in the neighboring kindergartens. Velasquez (1992) suggested the use of the High Scope curriculum in both the preschool and kindergarten classrooms because it emphasizes planning, doing and recall skills in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Involving parents in their children's education was directly connected to ensuring that children demonstrated the readiness skills to enter kindergarten. Parent-teacher-student partnerships could include providing parents with home-activity bags to encourage parents to spend quality time doing a learning activity with their child (Bridges, 1996). Hanson and Lynch (1992) emphasized the importance of including families' input about their cultures into the curriculum in order to enhance parent-teacher communication. To further cement this partnership and support parental understanding of DAP, the writer could develop a video to educate parents and teachers about DAP and kindergarten readiness (Cummins, 1998; Smith, 1999). She could publish a newsletter with information about the early childhood program and DAP (Passidomo, 1994). Parent information nights, at the preschool site, could also be offered to meet kindergarten teachers and receive an overview of the kindergarten program (Meir & Schafran, 1999).

Conclusively, parents who are involved in their children's child development programs better understand the ages and stages of preschool development, and exceed in recognizing their children's developmental milestones, and readiness for further challenges (Andre, Hawley, & Rockwell, 1995).

Cultivating children's developmental skills required teachers to really understand child development. In-service training over and above teacher education and experience significantly related to program quality and was directly related to young children's positive development (Epstein, 1999). Roberson (1998) suggested that when trainers put together professional staff-development sessions, they should provide teachers with more guidance on how to incorporate the use of technology into their curriculum planning. Additionally, teachers need more direction into how they can improve the quality of their programs and promote literacy. According to Wasley (1999), teacher training needed to include a range of strategies for dealing with curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school context because it is important to vary instructional techniques to meet the individual learning abilities of each student. Training sessions could be presented on increasing teachers' awareness of how to foster partnerships with parents (Connecticut Early Childhood Education Council, 1996). When considering training sessions, trainers needed to solicit interest from their stakeholders. The writer has accomplished this task by allowing teachers to have some input into training topics beyond the mandatory training sessions required by the military.

With the acquisition of knowledge gained through training, comes the expectation that teachers will apply what they have learned. According to Gestwicki (1995), it is important to examine practices that do not belong to the developmentally appropriate classroom before moving to the specifics of how to implement DAP for children from

birth through age eight. O'Brien (1996) found that teachers are torn between adhering to a developmental curriculum and to their need to use more formal teacher-directed instruction to prepare children from poor home environments for public school. Teachers need to consider how children construct knowledge when developing appropriate curricula and teaching strategies for young children (Katz, 1996). To assess children's learning, teachers could conduct classroom observations using a classroom-practices inventory (McMullen, 1999). Clearly, teachers serve as role-models, and children imitate and try to assimilate the behaviors of those teachers that they admire (Cartwright, 1999).

Teachers could implement child-initiated instructional teaching practices that encourage children to learn through play. Brewer and Kieff (1997) stated that play was critical to promoting large and small muscle development, learning to socialize, and developing critical thinking skills. This child-initiated teaching strategy supported individualizing the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of each child to include our special needs children. In the book Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, edited by Bredekamp and Copple (1997) the revised DAP guidelines addressed that special needs children flourish and learn best in inclusive child development settings with their peers. Individualized learning in a mixed-age group and knowing what each child needs is the challenge of childcare (Godwin & Schrag, 1996).

DAP involved more than parent involvement, knowledgeable teachers and good teaching practices. The classroom physical environment needs to be inviting and rich in print to develop strong literacy skills in preschoolers (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). Greenman (1988) wrote that teachers need to know how to set up welcoming environments for children to explore, play and learn. The writer could teach her teachers how to evaluate their

classroom environments using a tool such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) to measure the quality of environments in child center settings (Clifford, Cryer & Harms, 1998). Additionally, the writer could put together a list of developmentally age-appropriate play materials for preschool teachers to refer to when evaluating their classroom environments (Bronson, 1997).

Having synthesized the solutions from a literature review, the writer has generated some possible solution sets to target the problem of teachers being able to implement DAP in their classroom settings, as well as being able to both understand and communicate how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. The first idea generated was that the writer could offer professional teacher-development training sessions on curriculum planning and instruction, parent involvement and DAP that promote preschool children's growth and readiness for kindergarten. To further support teachers' professional development and improve their instructional practices, the writer could incorporate classroom visits as a way to improve the overall quality of care in the classrooms.

A third idea surfaced from the writer's experience working with parents in the center-based setting and through brainstorming with coworkers. The writer could compile a kindergarten readiness handbook to distribute to parents with preschoolers. In addition to this written education tool, the writer could provide parents with training sessions on DAP. These sessions could increase parents' understanding of DAP and their commitment to supporting their teachers' efforts to use good instructional practices when they implement age-appropriate and individually appropriate curriculum activities in welcoming classroom environments.

The last idea generated from the readings was to set up these welcoming classroom environments. The writer could use the ECERS (Clifford et al., 1998) to

measure the quality of preschool classroom environments. From this assessment, teachers could make improvements in these environments which, in turn, could improve the quality of preschool care.

The following was a critique of the feasibility of implementing the above solutions in the writer's work setting. It was not feasible to standardize the curriculums, such as using High Scope between the preschool and public school kindergarten. This was so, because both the preschool and kindergarten classrooms were in separate facilities and were not required to use a uniform curriculum between grades.

Turning our attention to parent-involvement solutions, it was feasible to offer parents home-activity cards, but not to include all of the materials due to budgetary reasons. These activity cards can serve the intent of encouraging parents to spend quality time doing a learning activity with their child. It was also feasible to include as part of the writer's parent-education program, information nights at the preschool site, to meet kindergarten teachers and receive an overview of the kindergarten program. A look at other parent-involvement strategies brought to question the feasibility of making an educational video for parents. Due to the writer's limited technological skills in producing a quality video and the absence of video camera equipment, it was not feasible to develop a video to educate parents and teachers about DAP and kindergarten readiness. Unlike the challenges of producing a quality DAP video, it was feasible to add information to the writer's monthly newsletter on DAP and how it promotes preschool children's growth and development and readiness for kindergarten. The writer could also put together a handbook specifically designed to provide preschool parents with specific information on kindergarten readiness.

Along with educating our parents on DAP, it was critical to address and support

.eachers' professional development, too. It was feasible to offer in-service professional development sessions on curriculum planning and instruction, parent involvement and DAP that promote preschool children's growth and readiness for kindergarten. As part of a training session, it was feasible to put together a hand-out of developmentally age-appropriate play materials for preschool teachers to refer to when evaluating their classroom environments.

With training in hand, teachers can apply their knowledge to setting up and evaluating classroom environments. It was feasible to use the ECERS (Clifford et al., 1998) to evaluate classroom interest centers because this tool specifically focused on assessing classroom environments. Within these classroom environments, it was also feasible for the writer to visit and conduct observations using a DAP observation tool.

Description of Selected Solutions

The writer implemented a 4-point strategy. This strategy included (a) presenting workshops during naptime to teachers with read-ahead articles and follow-up activities to do in the classrooms, (b) providing teachers with a classroom-environment evaluation tool, (c) conducting bimonthly classroom visits, and (d) planning ways to form a partnership between the child development and youth centers' teachers and parents.

This 4-point strategy was appropriate and supported the causes for teachers not being able to communicate how their curriculum and instructional approaches prepare children for kindergarten readiness. The writer presented training sessions that go beyond general information on DAP. She offered sessions that specifically addressed how and why these practices promoted children's growth and development.

While the literature supported the direct link between quality child care and professional development, the National Research Council (1999) stressed that other

factors such as, setting up enriched classroom environments, strong parent-teacher communication, strong teaching methods, and a varied curriculum played key roles in promoting children's growth and development. Addressing the classroom environment, the set-up of the physical environment can either send the message that preschoolers need to depend on adults to get them what they want to play with or that preschoolers are welcomed in this trusting setting that promotes independence and exploration. The writer had her teachers critically look at what message their environments were sending to children and families. She had them evaluate their classroom environments to assess how the materials and equipment in the interest centers promoted children's learning.

To improve the implementation of developmentally age and individually appropriate curriculum and teaching methods in the classroom settings, the writer increased her presence in the classrooms. According to Bickart and Dodge (1998), when teachers asked open-ended questions requiring more than a yes or no answer in a child-initiated play environment, children were empowered to learn and grow. During the writer's classroom visits, she role-modeled these positive teaching practices and lent mentoring support to both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

Finally, Andre et al. (1995) documented that when parents and child development programs form partnerships, a positive environment is offered in both home and center to better foster children's achievement. In support of positive parent–teacher relationships, the writer assisted teachers and parents in forming a partnership. This partnership served as an opportunity to learn more about the child, thus enhancing the child's social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development. Ultimately, through partnering both parents and teachers better understood how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness.

This 4-point strategy supported the outcome of teachers implementing DAP in their classrooms and being able to communicate how their curriculum and instructional approaches prepared children for kindergarten readiness. Naptime training sessions on curriculum and instruction, language and literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, setting up classroom environments and parent involvement allowed teachers to better implement, understand and communicate how DAP prepares young children for kindergarten.

Teachers recognized what age-appropriate equipment and supplies was needed in each interest center and how these materials promoted children's learning. This outcome was achieved by first educating them on how to evaluate their classroom environment using the ECERS (Clifford et al., 1998). Next, teachers received a hand-out of developmentally age-appropriate play materials and conducted a preevaluation of their classroom environment using this scale. To further improve understanding and communication of DAP, the writer provided feedback on their classroom environments and teachers made necessary classroom-environment improvements and then reevaluated their classroom.

Beyond the writer's feedback on classroom environments, she conducted bimonthly classroom visits. During these visits, the writer role-modeled DAP, provided guidance on curriculum planning and instruction, expanded on concepts learned in training sessions and assessed teachers' implementation of DAP. The writer's assistance during classroom visits improved teachers' instructional techniques, interactions with young children and support for children's growth and development.

In order to expand the quality of care both in and outside the classroom, the writer initiated some parent-involvement projects at her work setting. She created and

disseminated a kindergarten readiness handbook and offered homework-activity cards to parents on a monthly basis. The writer included information on DAP in monthly newsletters. She also offered parent-education sessions on preschool development, how children learn, and kindergarten readiness. To further cement the partnership between home and school and increase both the parents' and teachers' understanding of DAP, the writer and teachers brainstormed parent-involvement activities to include on curriculum plans that were based on children's interests and needs. Parent input was sought. All these parent-involvement strategies helped teachers to explain how parent participation promotes children's growth and development.

Report of Action Taken

The key players involved in the following action plan to implement DAP in the classrooms were the writer and the military center-based teachers. From the onset, all teachers received a letter from the writer informing them that the writer's proposal had been approved and stating the date that implementation would begin. It defined the proposal's objectives, timeline and briefly addressed what role each player played as this implementation process unfolded.

The writer assumed the leadership role in implementing this practicum. She presented the workshops, assisted teachers with assessing their classroom environments, conducted classroom visits, and planned parent-involvement activities.

The writer primarily used her own written materials along with the texts listed in the resource list (see Appendix C) for conducting her training workshops. She also supplemented with articles and information from other early childhood journals and books.

The specific topics presented at the naptime workshops were (a) curriculum and

instruction, (b) setting up and evaluating classroom environments, (c) preschooler's social and emotional development, (d) preschooler's physical and cognitive development, (e) language and literacy, and (f) parent involvement. These mandatory naptime sessions were 1hour long. Each workshop included an icebreaker, lecture, hands-on activities, and discussion time. All training was conducted at the child development centers from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Prior to each training session, a read-ahead article(s) with a book report form (see Appendix D) was given to each teacher to read and complete, and to be handed in at the training session. The read-ahead articles included information on multiple intelligences, the role room arrangement plays in curriculum design, character development, constructivism and brain research, enhancing preschoolers' language development, and parent conferences.

Upon completion of the session, a follow-up activity was assigned to the teachers to be completed in their classrooms. The first homework assignment required teachers to observe a coworker interacting with preschoolers for 10 minutes and then document the observation, identify instructional techniques, curriculum activities and preschool skills learned. The second homework assignment focused on evaluating their classroom environments using the ECERS tool. The third homework assignment asked teachers to plan an activity to support preschoolers' social and emotional development. Teachers were to implement this activity, observe one child, and identify the child's stage of play and what social and emotional skills were learned when engaged in the planned activity. Similarly, for the fourth homework assignment, teachers were also required to plan either a physical or cognitive activity, implement it, observe a child, identify what physical or cognitive skills were learned when engaged in the planned activity. The fifth homework

assignment also asked teachers to plan not one, but three literacy activities, to include one prereading, prewriting and listening activity. Teachers were then asked to write an evaluation explaining how these activities built on preschoolers' previous knowledge and challenged them to learn new literacy skills. Finally, the sixth homework assignment allowed teachers to survey their parents as to their celebrations, traditions, and their children's likes and dislikes, and to incorporate one parent-involvement activity into their curriculum plans. These homework assignments reinforced skills learned during the naptime sessions.

In addition to training sessions, the writer provided teachers with resource materials on what should be included in their classroom interest centers. She evaluated each of the eight classroom environments using the ECERS. This rating scale reviewed 43 items in seven subscales. These subscales were space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure and parents and staff. Upon completion of these ECERS tools, the writer sat down with the teachers in each of the eight rooms and she and the teachers compared their respective ECERS scores. Together, they made an improvement plan and began to enrich their classroom environments. At the end of the practicum implementation, the writer and teachers then reevaluated the environments and identified areas that improved and those that needed more attention. This environmental evaluation process motivated teachers to critically assess and evaluate classroom strengths and weaknesses. The winners in this process were all the stakeholders, the teachers, children and families.

Looking beyond the physical classroom environments, the writer also observed and assessed the implementation of developmentally appropriate activities, and instructional techniques during her bimonthly classroom visits. She served as a mentor,

role-model, trainer, curriculum expert, advisor, coach, observer and evaluator when conducting these visits. Classroom visits usually lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour. The writer visited the classrooms at different times of the day to include meal and snack times and during outdoor play. She spent some of her time directly interacting with the children. There were many play scenarios to recall, but the writer vividly remembered playing with three children in dramatic play and pretending to eat their gourmet spaghetti dinner. What imaginations these three children had. Their pretend spaghetti, in reality, was made from colorful beaded necklaces. These long strands of beads were cooked in a pot on the play stove. During imaginary play, the writer asked the preschoolers open-ended questions like, "Besides the spaghetti and sauce, what else could you cook with the spaghetti?" "Where else might you cook the spaghetti?" Everyone had a fun time eating and conversing during this dramatic play experience.

In another play situation, the writer invited a child, who was wandering around but not making a choice of interest centers to play in, into the block interest center. Two other children were already involved in making constructions. She facilitated play by asking the child if she could help her build something. The writer said, " My cat is sick and needs a doctor." The child and the other two children in the block center thought that the cat needed to go to the doctor. Quickly, the writer and children decided to build a hospital out of the unit blocks. Then, they put the pretend cat and some zoo animals in the dump truck and drove it to their hospital. The writer met her objectives in both the dramatic play and block play episodes, and throughout the practicum implementation. These objectives were to facilitate children's play and role-model DAP.

In addition to this active play engagement, the writer spent the rest of her classroom visit time occupied with conducting objective observations and evaluating

teachers' instructional techniques, activities, classroom environments, and opportunities for parent involvement. At the final classroom visit, the writer used the Kindergarten Readiness Developmentally Appropriate Practices Classroom Observation Tool (see Appendix B) to document her observations and assessments. She also distributed this tool to the teachers and offered them an opportunity to do a self-evaluation. They were instructed to complete just the assessment section of the tool. They were encouraged to write comments referencing the numbered criteria, rather than just a yes or no answer. These self-evaluations were to be turned into the writer by the last week of practicum implementation. It was exhilarating to see the positive transformations take place in the quality of teacher-child instruction, implementation of higher level learning activities, the enrichment of classroom interest centers and the emergence of opportunities for parent involvement in these preschool classrooms.

There was a multitude of parent-involvement opportunities that generated from both the writer and the teachers over the course of this practicum implementation. Homework-activity cards on teaching math (see Appendix E), writing, reading, science, physical, and creativity to prepare children for kindergarten were distributed monthly to parents. These homework cards encouraged parents to spend quality time, if they chose to, doing a developmentally age-appropriate learning activity with their child.

To further educate parents on DAP, the writer conducted three workshops. The topics covered were (a) preschool development, (b) learning through play, and (c) preparing your preschooler for kindergarten. These training sessions were offered at different times of the day, to include lunchtime and at the end of the workday at 4:30 p.m. Also, to attract as many participants to these classes, participants had a choice of two days to attend. All workshops were held at the main child development center except the

Learning through Play sessions were held at the family support center in conjunction with other parenting classes offered in support of April's Month of the Military Child events.

All three workshops offered participants opportunities to gather resource materials, listen to a short lecture, and engage in small-group discussions. Content-wise, the Preschool Development session covered milestones from 3- to 6-years to include language, physical gross and fine motor development and activities, emotional development (Erik Erickson's initiative versus guilt), and social development (self-esteem and self-concept) taken from the book, Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs edited by Bredekamp and Copple (1997). Learning through Play shared the developmental sequence of play from functional to constructive to make-believe play, the importance of following a consistent daily activity schedule, and how the environment is set up into interest centers (art, blocks, manipulatives, library, writing, science, math, sand and water, dramatic play, music, and so on). Emphasis was on developing the whole child through play. The final session, Preparing your Preschooler for Kindergarten had a panel of speakers to include the principal and a kindergarten teacher from the district school that the military children attend. These individuals went over how to register for kindergarten and what they expected preschoolers to know when entering into kindergarten in the fall. For the most part, this district's expectations were developmentally age-appropriate.

Attendance at these three sessions was small averaging anywhere from three to 10 parents at a session, but those in attendance provided the writer with positive verbal feedback. For those who could not attend, the writer had copies of the workshop hand-outs available in each preschool classroom. Over the course of the practicum implementation, the writer also met individually with parents who had specific questions

regarding their preschooler's development.

To further support parental involvement, monthly newsletters included information on children's growth and development and activities offered, by the teachers as well as the writer, so parents would know what to participate in. Classroom parent-involvement activities included participating in hands-on classroom activities during the month of the military child to tilling the garden plots in preparation for June planting. Two individuals, a child development center director and another training specialist, who were both working on their master's degrees in early childhood, were instrumental in highlighting literacy information from a series of early childhood journals in these monthly newsletters.

Midway through the practicum implementation, at the parent advisory board meeting, the writer shared her progress in developing the Kindergarten Readiness Parent Handbook (see Appendix F). During the end of the sixth month of implementation, she gave this handbook to the classrooms for distribution to parents. This handbook highlighted activities to do with your preschooler to promote kindergarten readiness and tips to get ready for that first day of school.

With the exception of changing the learning through play workshop to coincide with the month of the military child and adding additional training sessions for teachers due to staff shortages caused by an outbreak of the flu, the practicum implementation went smoothly. Both the center directors and writer's supervisor were committed to this project. They lent their support and encouragement throughout the implementation process.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem in the writer's work setting was that the military preschool teachers were having difficulty understanding how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. Although the teachers ensured that children have a safe and nurturing environment to explore and learn, they were not comprehending and articulating to others what were the best practices needed to support each preschooler's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth and development in their classroom settings.

The writer implemented a 4-point strategy to address this problem. This strategy included conducting training sessions for teachers on preschoolers' social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development, evaluating classroom environments, curriculum and teaching instruction, and parent involvement with read-ahead articles and homework assignments. Also, both the teachers and the writer assessed classroom environments, generated improvement plans and improved classroom environments.

Parents were offered parenting education via monthly parent homework-activity cards and information on child growth and development in the monthly center newsletters. Additionally, the writer offered parents three workshops focusing on how children learn through play, ages and stages of development, and what to expect and how to prepare your child for kindergarten. To further support kindergarten readiness, the writer distributed a kindergarten readiness handbook to preschool parents. Teachers augmented this parenting education by offering parents opportunities to get involved in their children's classrooms and learn more about DAP. Finally, the writer visited each teacher's classroom on a bimonthly basis to offer support and to role-model DAP. This 4-point strategy supported the practicum's goal that the military preschool teachers

would care for their children using the best practices available for supporting children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth and development, and would be able to communicate how their curriculum and instructional approaches prepared children for kindergarten readiness.

The first outcome expected for this practicum was that 16 of 20 teachers would provide children with developmentally appropriate activities on a daily basis and understand how these activities promote children's development. This first outcome was met.

Under this category of developmentally appropriate activities on the kindergarten readiness DAP observation tool, the writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrate 16 of the 20 developmentally appropriate behaviors listed on this observation tool (see Appendix B). In fact, the writer's observations and assessments indicated that 18 of the 20 teachers demonstrated all of the 20 DAP behaviors and the remaining two teachers demonstrated 17 and 18 behaviors, respectively. The teacher who scored 17 out of 20 did not demonstrate Numbers 14, 15 and 19. The teacher who scored 18 out of 20 behaviors did not demonstrate Numbers 7 and 19. In addition to the writer's favorable findings, the eight teachers who participated in completing the self-evaluation unanimously agreed that this outcome was met.

The second outcome was that 16 of the 20 teachers would set up their classroom environments to meet the interests and needs of children in their care and understand how these materials promoted children's learning. Using the ECERS tool proved helpful in identifying areas where improvements were needed, to include promoting acceptance of diversity and adding more materials in the science and math centers. Work is ongoing in the eight classrooms. While this outcome was met with 18 of the 20 teachers meeting

four out of five of the environment behaviors, two teachers from one classroom still need to work on the environmental behaviors of observing children, adding or rotating materials, and reflecting diversity with no gender bias (see Table 1).

Table 1

Criteria for Developmentally Appropriate Preschool Classroom Environments

Behaviors	No. of Teachers Demonstrating Behaviors
Display toys on labeled shelves	20
Variety of classroom interest centers	20
Observe children and add/rotate materials	18
Reflect diversity and are not gender bias	18

The third outcome was that 16 of the 20 teachers would be able to explain to others and demonstrate four of the five developmentally appropriate instructional techniques during their interactions with children in their care. This outcome was met. Based on evidence from both a review of teachers' anecdotal child observations, and the writer's formal teacher observations, it was clear that 18 of the 20 teachers consistently observed their children during free play. Furthermore, these teacher observations revealed that all 20 teachers offered a variety of teaching instructional techniques to include modeling, demonstrating, and facilitation. Teachers actually performed the behaviors that they wanted children to imitate, such as exhibiting positive social skills of sharing and taking turns. They also used the teachable moment to show children how to use scissors or how to identify numbers when these and other interests emerged.

Additionally, teachers entered into children's play and extended their learning by asking open-ended questions and introducing new concepts to expand imaginary play. Indeed, all 20 teachers offered a balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated, individual, small and large-group activities. While these teachers met the first four behaviors, only 15 of the 20 teachers were able to articulate their instructional techniques to others. Three of the teachers' self-evaluations also indicated that this was an area where the teachers were a little insecure. The military teachers still had some difficulty in communicating to others the instructional techniques employed to support preschoolers' learning and total development (see Table 2).

Table 2

Criteria for Developmentally Appropriate Preschool Instructional Techniques

Behaviors	No. of Teachers Demonstrating Behaviors
Observe children during free play	18
Facilitate play and ask open-ended questions	20
Balance teacher and child-initiated activities	20
Balance individual, small and large group activities	20
Explain instructional activities to others	15

The fourth outcome was that 16 of the 20 teachers would include parent-involvement activities into their curriculum and would be able to explain to parents how parent participation promotes their children's growth and development. This outcome was not met. The writer expected to observe 16 of the 20 teachers demonstrating four of the five parent-involvement behaviors. In fact, these teachers only met three of the five

behaviors. Eighteen of the 20 teachers included parent-involvement activities in the curriculum plans. They posted this information on the parent information board and encouraged parents to sign up for these planned activities. Seventeen of the 20 teachers also shared information both verbally and in writing with parents about their individual child's development. This information was shared at greeting and departure times, during formal parent conferences, and through written documentation on the children's individual anecdotal observation records. Confidentiality was always maintained when sharing both written and verbal information with families. Finally, all 20 teachers posted relevant articles on preschool growth and development, parenting tips and age-appropriate activities on their parent information boards. These articles were readily available for dissemination to interested parents.

As for the not met behaviors, teachers did ask questions about holiday celebrations and cultural preferences, but only 15 of the 20 teachers solicited information about parents' interests in participating in their child's program. The self-evaluation surveys support this finding, with three of the eight teachers stating yes to only asking about the cultural background of parents. Finally, only 14 of the 20 teachers solicited parent input into identifying developmental goals for their children and planning curriculum activities (see Table 3).

Discussion

It was exciting to witness the transformation that took place in the centers' eight preschool classrooms. Teachers were planning developmentally age-appropriate curriculum activities to meet the interests and needs of young children. They understood not only how to implement a DAP curriculum, but also why these activities support children's growth and development. Classroom environments were enriched with

Table 3

Criteria for Parent Involvement in Preschool Classrooms

Behaviors	No. of Teachers Demonstrating Behaviors
Survey parents about their cultural background and interest in participating in their child's program	15
Include parent involvement activities in curriculum	18
Share information with parents both verbally and in writing about individual children's development	17
Soliciting parent input into identifying developmental goals for their children and planning curriculum activities	14
Provide parents with information on preschool development and activities	20

materials displayed on low shelves labeled with both words and pictures. Preschoolers had immediate access to materials that were both interesting, and that challenged and built on children's previous knowledge and skills. Language and literacy was also prevalent throughout these stimulating interest centers.

In spite of the strides made in implementing a DAP curriculum and setting up welcoming classroom environments, five of these 20 teachers still had difficulty verbalizing to others about the merits of their instructional techniques. Clearly, in the writer's opinion, anyone educated in DAP would agree that by observing children interacting in these interest centers it was evident that children learn best through child-initiated play balanced with some direct teacher instruction. Yet, five of the teachers did

not feel comfortable communicating that utilizing these teaching methods is more effective in preparing preschoolers for kindergarten than focusing only on teacher-directed instruction. More work is needed to convince teachers, both at the writer's centers and throughout the early childhood community, that the principles set forth in the book, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, edited by Bredekamp and Copple (1997) are the necessary ingredients for planning developmentally age and individually appropriate curriculum, building a common understanding of how children best learn, and fostering children's experimentation, learning and development. While instructional techniques were a concern that still needs some attention, parent involvement demanded more immediate emphasis. It is disconcerting that these teachers did not fully understand the important role parents play in their children's lives at the child development and youth centers. Whereas, teachers felt comfortable in disseminating information on key preschool topics and early childhood trends, and welcoming parents to participate in activities, they did not exert as much enthusiasm when it came to seeking parents' input into the curriculum planning process. In many cases, curriculum plans were void of this valuable information. Without hesitation, parents have a lot to contribute about what their children like to do, and whom these children are when they are away from the center, and in their home environments. Partnering with parents was and continues to be an area where more energy needs to be expended.

Overall, the writer was very pleased with the results of this practicum implementation. Teachers have a greater understanding of DAP and how to implement developmentally appropriate activities into the curriculum. They know the differences between curriculum planning and instruction. Furthermore, these teachers now know

how to assess and improve their classroom environments so these environments encourage child exploration and learning. These teachers have taken the first of many steps to involve parents in their children's learning process in their classroom settings. In addition to these extrinsic achievements, teachers have voiced to the writer that they want to act as mentors to new preschool teachers, sharing what they have learned about DAP and how DAP leads to kindergarten readiness. The writer believes that these teachers will share the message of DAP and its positive impact on quality child care both inside and outside their preschool programs.

Recommendations

The following were five recommendations made by the writer to improve DAP in the preschool classroom environments:

1. The training specialist or designee should continue conducting classroom visits, but the frequency of visits should be based on each classroom's individual needs.

2. The training specialist or designee should provide written feedback to teachers on these classroom visits.

3. The training specialist and teachers should continue evaluating their classroom environments on a quarterly basis.

4. The training specialist or designee should continue to conduct monthly formal training sessions.

5. The training specialist and teachers should devise a parent involvement plan.

Turning first to classroom visits, it was critical to see first hand how the teachers were implementing the concepts taught during the formal training sessions. During this practicum implementation, teachers needed the bimonthly contact from the training specialist to answer their questions, clarify homework assignments and most importantly

role-model what DAP behaviors she expected to observe from them. To maintain these quality staff-child interactions and lend further support, the writer recommends that these classroom visits become a mainstay of classroom operations. While initially the bimonthly visits were necessary to keep the positive momentum going, the frequency of visits should now be a factor of the classroom teacher make-up. In other words, if the teacher composition stays consistent with little to no turnover and the teachers continue to demonstrate strong developmental practices, then the classroom visits should be reduced to monthly. On the other hand, should there be less experienced teachers introduced into the classrooms, then they will either need more frequent visits from the training specialist or the more experienced teachers will have to assume more responsibility for mentoring these new teachers. In summation, the frequency of classroom visits should be based on the needs of the individual classrooms.

Keeping with the classroom visits issue, this practicum surfaced that teachers only received verbal feedback from the training specialist on these visits, even though the writer documented her observations and used the Kindergarten Readiness Developmentally Appropriate Practices Classroom Observation Tool (see Appendix B) for the final one. In hindsight, the writer's verbal communication was positive and constructive, but teachers might have benefited more from written feedback on their progress in implementing DAP activities and instructional techniques in their classroom environments. For future classroom visits, the second recommendation would be to devise a simple observation form, and to share the results in writing with teachers after completion of each formal observation. The observer should continue to highlight and provide constructive feedback in the areas of DAP activities, curriculum planning and instruction on this observation form.

Written feedback proved instrumental in improving classroom environments. With that thought in mind, the third recommendation would be to continue assessing classroom environments and providing teachers with a written improvement plan to make necessary changes to these classroom settings. To allow for adequate time to make improvements, such as creating home-made games and multicultural posters, the writer feels that quarterly classroom-environment evaluations are sufficient. In further support of this quarterly review frequency, once improvements are completed, there needs to be time for both teachers and the training specialist to observe children in these changed environments. Observations of children manipulating and exploring these new surroundings will help teachers and the training specialist to determine if these changes have been beneficial or if more changes are required to enhance children's learning and development.

Moving on to the fourth recommendation regarding training, the writer recognized that in order to implement the best developmentally appropriate practices to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten readiness, teachers needed to know child development theory and research. Teachers have communicated to the writer how they have enjoyed these monthly training sessions and the opportunity to brainstorm ideas about implementing DAP in their classrooms. To further support teachers' professional development and augment their knowledge in early childhood theory and research, the writer would recommend that these monthly training sessions continue and that experienced teachers be empowered to conduct some of these sessions for their peers.

Finally, teachers have begun to take small baby steps in the direction of dialoguing and involving parents in their preschool programs. To further enhance these beginning efforts, the fifth recommendation would be to develop a parent-involvement

plan. This parent-involvement plan would include, but not be limited to (a) conducting a parent classroom orientation with each family to introduce the parents to the daily classroom routines, to have them complete a survey about their cultural and family practices, and a questionnaire about their child's interests and needs, (b) disseminating parent homework-activity cards to provide parents with fun DAP ideas to do in their home environments, (c) soliciting, on a monthly basis, any activity inputs from parents to be considered during curriculum planning, (d) devising and distributing an annual calendar outlining the monthly classroom activities that are planned for parent participation, (e) providing a list of suggested projects and materials that parents could do or collect at home and bring to the center to support preschool classroom operations, and (f) offering opportunities on an annual basis and as needed for parent conferences so teachers could share preschoolers' progress and together with parents devise developmental goals for their children. This plan would be a living document that is flexible and focuses on planning ways to strengthen the partnership between the preschool programs and home.

Dissemination

The writer plans to share her practicum findings with her coworkers at a future staff meeting. Beyond the workplace, she will also contact her military headquarters and brief them on the results. She hopes to share her innovative strategies with other military preschool teachers at different stateside and worldwide bases.

Moving from the military microsystem to the early childhood macrosystem, the writer plans to present her practicum findings and information on assessing classroom environments, setting up training sessions, conducting classroom visits, and planning partnerships between the child development, youth centers' preschool teachers and

parents at state and national conferences. While the writer will not be available to present at the 2000 state and national association for the education of young children conferences, she plans to submit proposals for the year 2001.

Beyond the formal presentations, the writer's practicum has opened networking opportunities for her with other early childhood professionals. She plans to establish partnerships with some of these networking contacts. Ultimately, her goal is to mentor others and raise the level of quality child care not only in military preschool centers but also in the civilian communities.

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APPENDIX A

KINDERGARTEN READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

KINDERGARTEN READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME _____ DATE _____

CENTER _____ CLASSROOM _____

CURRICULUM PLANNING - DAP ACTIVITIES

1. Please list three physical activities that you plan for preschoolers.
a.

b.

c.

2. Please explain how these three physical activities promote preschooler's physical development.
a.

b.

c.

3. Please list three cognitive activities that you plan for preschoolers.
a.

b.

c.

4. Please explain how these three cognitive activities promote preschoolers' cognitive development.
a.

b.

c.

5. Please list three social activities that you plan for preschoolers.
a.

b.

c.

6. Please explain how these three social activities promote preschoolers' social development.
a.

b.

c.

7. Please list three activities that you plan to address preschoolers' emotions.
a.

b.

c.

8. Please explain how these three emotional activities promote preschoolers' emotional development.
a.

b.

c.

9. Please list three language activities that you plan for preschoolers.
a.

b.

c.

10. Please explain how these three language activities promote preschoolers' language development.
a.

b.

c.

TEACHING INSTRUCTION

1. Please explain how you teach children free play?

2. Please explain how you teach children during small group time?

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

1. Please list up to 5 items that are presently in your interest centers and what children learn using these materials.

BLOCK CENTER

MATERIALS	WHAT CHILDREN LEARN USING THESE MATERIALS
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

MATH/SCIENCE CENTER

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

LIBRARY CENTER

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

WRITING CENTER

1.	1.
2.	2.

MATERIALS	WHAT CHILDREN LEARN USING THESE MATERIALS
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
ART CENTER	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
MUSIC CENTER	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
MANIPULATIVES	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
WOODWORKING CENTER	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

MATERIALS	WHAT CHILDREN LEARN USING THESE MATERIALS
PLAYGROUND	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

1. Please list up to 5 ways that you presently involve parents in your program.

a.

b.

c.

d.

2. Please explain how parent involvement promotes preschoolers' growth and development.

3. Please explain how you presently share information with parents.

4. What kinds of information do you share and why?

Please use the space below to write any comments regarding your answers to the questions in this questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX B

KINDERGARTEN READINESS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL

KINDERGARTEN READINESS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL

Name_____ Date_____
Classroom _____

I. DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Preschool teachers offer activities that promote children's social skills to include opportunities for children to:

1. Share and take turns,
2. Initiate relationships with others,
3. Negotiate and come to agreement with others, and
4. Appreciate how they are alike and different.

Observation

Assessment

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Preschool teachers offer activities that promote children's emotional development to include creating opportunities for children to:

5. Identify their feelings and those of others,
6. Express their feelings,
7. Exercise self-control, and
8. Succeed in completing self-initiated and assigned tasks.

Observation

Assessment

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Preschool teachers offer activities that promote children's physical development to include creating opportunities for children to:

9. Balance and lift their bodies-gross motor,
10. Move their bodies in different directions to gain spatial awareness,
11. Use small muscles for eye-hand coordination, and
12. Use small muscles for feet and toe coordination.

Observation

Assessment

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Preschool teachers offer activities that promote children's cognitive development to include creating opportunities for children to:

13. Explore using their senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell),
14. Group, number, order, and compare people, places, things and events,
15. Problem solve to make decisions, and
16. Increase their attention span.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Preschool teachers offer activities that promote children's language development to include creating opportunities for children to:

17. Listen to others and understand what was communicated to them,
18. Use verbal and non-verbal language to communicate,
19. Exhibit pre-reading skills of caring for books, and reading comprehension from interpreting the

symbols, print and/or pictures in text, and

20. Scribble, copy and write letters, pictures, words and symbols.

Observation

Assessment

II. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

1. Developmentally age appropriate materials are displayed on low shelves labeled with pictures and words and are accessible for preschoolers' use.
2. Classroom interest centers include, but are not limited to, the following: woodworking, science, math, blocks, writing, library, dramatic play, art, music, manipulatives and playground.
3. Preschool teachers observe children during play in these interest centers and both add and rotate materials based on children's interests and needs.
4. Preschool teachers ensure that classroom environments reflect preschoolers' cultural diversity and are not gender bias.

Observation

Assessment

III. INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

1. Preschool teachers observe children during free play.
2. Preschool teachers facilitate children's play and expand on it by using open-ended questions.
3. Preschool teachers offer a balance of child initiated and teacher directed activities each day.
4. Preschool teachers offer children a balance of individual, small and large group activities each day.
5. Preschool teachers explain their instructional techniques to others.

Observation

Assessment

IV. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

1. Preschool teachers survey parents asking about their cultural background and their interests in participating in their child's program.
2. Preschool teachers include parent involvement activities in their curriculum.
3. Preschool teachers share information both verbally and in writing with parents about their individual child's development.
4. Preschool teachers solicit parent input into identifying developmental goals for their children and planning curriculum activities.
5. Preschool teachers provide parents with information on preschool development and activities they can do at home to help their preschoolers grow and develop.

Observation

Assessment

Total Behaviors observed

Developmentally Appropriate Activities _____ Classroom Environments _____

Instructional Techniques _____ Parent Involvement _____

APPENDIX C

RESOURCE LIST

Resource List

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APPENDIX D

BOOK REPORT FORM

BOOK REPORT FORM

Title of Article_____

1. Please highlight the main ideas covered in the reading?

2. What part of the reading did you like the most, why?

3. What ideas can you implement in your preschool classroom?

Name _____

Date_____

APPENDIX E

PARENT HOMEWORK ACTIVITIES

PARENT HOMEWORK ACTIVITIES

TEACHING MATH CONCEPTS

Setting the Table

Let your preschooler set the table for you. He will learn one-to-one correspondence as he places a fork, spoon and knife at each place setting. Count how many plates, spoons, forks and knives are needed. Let your preschooler put away the silverware so that he can learn sorting and matching skills.

Cooking Experiences

Preschoolers love to participate in food preparation. In doing so, they learn measurement skills such as, teaspoon, tablespoon, half a cup, etc. Make up a simple recipe like trail mix and then let your preschooler count and measure the ingredients into a bowl and then enjoy their own prepared snack.

Trail Mix

Add the following ingredients into a bowl, mix and eat:
5 mini pretzels
7 raisins
10 marshmallows
¼ cup of peanuts
½ cup of rice chex cereal
½ cup of wheat chex cereal

Counting Snacks

Using an empty egg carton as a container. Ask your child how many crackers, pieces of cheese, grapes, etc. he wants to eat and let him count them out into the egg carton cups. Your preschooler can count backwards as he eats (a way to play with subtraction). Remember that this is a game and should be fun for the child. Never insist on the child participating in this game in order to eat his snack.

Measurement – Ounces/Pounds and Inches/Feet

Let your child count the number of pieces of fruit that you want to purchase. He can put it into the scale and together you can read how much it weighs. Weigh different items and compare their weight. Talk about ounces and pounds. What is the heaviest, the lightest? Extend this activity at home by weighing the child, identifying the numbers, and writing down his weight. Using a tape measure, record how tall the child is, talk about the numbers and the measurement inches. Measure other things around the house using a ruler, yard stick, etc.

Number Recognition

Build using blocks. Together count how many blocks you used to build the construction. Make some cards, each having a number and a rectangle representing that number and let your child count the items on the card and compare to the number of items in his construction. For example, one card would have the number 6 and six circles under the number. The child counts the number of blocks he has used and finds that he has used 6 blocks. He goes through the cards till he comes to the one that shows the number 6 and its picture of 6 circles and matches the 6 real blocks with the number/picture card.

You can use these cards to compare with any real objects your child uses. Your child can count the number of socks when helping you fold laundry and then you can go to your cards and count the number of objects on the cards and match it to the number of socks counted. Remember that your child needs lots of practice understanding how to count real objects before he can match them to the abstract symbols of a number or drawing of an object.

Similarities and Differences

Everyday – Make it a game of comparing how things are different and the same. Look at their characteristics such as size, shape, and quantity. For example, look at two cars. How are they the same? Each has 4 tires, 6 windows, 1 hood, and 1 trunk. How are they different? One is red and one is blue. One has 4 doors and one has 2 doors. One has 5 seat belts and one has 6 seat belts. This daily exercise in comparing similarities and differences will help develop preschoolers' observational skills, knowledge of size, shape, color and quantity and improve their ability to attend to details.

APPENDIX F

KINDERGARTEN READINESS PARENT HANDBOOK

KINDERGARTEN

READINESS

PARENT

HANDBOOK

Dear Parents,

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with insights on how to prepare your children for kindergarten. I will share with you some information on activities to promote readiness skills, and expectations gleaned from my discussions with kindergarten teachers.

Enjoy reading the contents of this handbook and implementing the activities with your preschoolers. Relax and enjoy doing these learning experiences when both you and your preschoolers are ready and interested. Have a fun time learning together.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Kirshenbaum

Karen L. Kirshenbaum

Training and Curriculum Specialist

Kindergarten Readiness Tips

1. If your child will be riding the bus, take your child on a bus ride. Help your child understand about bus safety. Rules include:
   a. Stay seated on the bus.
   b. Use a quiet voice so you don't disturb the driver.
   c. When entering or leaving the bus, be sure to listen to the adult(s) so you know when it's safe to get on and off the bus.
2. When walking to school or to the bus stop, talk about safety:
   a. We cross at the crosswalk.
   b. Look both ways before you cross the street.
   c. We don't talk to strangers. Talk about what is a stranger and which adults will help you, such as; the bus driver, the teacher, and the police person.
3. Make sure that your child is up to date on their immunizations.
4. Be sure to provide the school with all emergency information such as, work phone numbers, physician's name and number, and persons who are authorized to pick up your child in your absence.
5. Children need to know their first and last name. They need to know their parent(s) first and last names. Help them learn their address to include the street and town/city name and their phone number.
6. Children will be learning to write and to identify the letters of the alphabet. When teaching them to write their name, use both upper and lower case letters.
7. Children will be doing small group activities such as listening to stories, as well as doing individual work at their desk/table. This work requires an increased attention span of approximately 10-15 minutes. To aid in increasing your child's attention

span, read stories and ask your child questions about the story or play a board game. Encourage your child to also play independently by maybe looking at books, drawing with markers and crayons, or spending time playing an educational computer game.

8. Prepare your child for the new school setting. Ask if you can visit the kindergarten classroom before school begins.
9. If possible, find a familiar face. Plan a one-on-one playdate or outing with another child from the class or program before school begins.
10. Create continuity. Start a daily routine a few weeks before school begins and involve your child in the process of choosing his/her clothes or packing a snack or lunch.
11. Be positive about going to school. If you convey confidence, your child will be more comfortable with beginning kindergarten.
12. After the first day of school, spend time finding out about your child's day. Become an involved parent. Attend parent meetings and volunteer in your child's classroom.

Preschool Activities

Large Motor Development

- Put on some music and both you and your child can exercise to it. Jump, hop, gallop, and pretend to skate to the music. Demonstrate each physical skill as needed.
- Play a game of kickball, bat and ball (use a large ball and plastic bat) or catch with your child.
- Go to the park and swing on the swings together, teaching your child how to pump his or her legs up and down.
- Climb up the ladder of the slide or practice climbing up and down the stairs in your home. This helps your child learn to alternate his or her feet.

Fine Motor Development

- Strengthen fingers and hands by letting your child cook with you. He or she can help knead and roll out the dough when you're making a pie. A substitute for real cooking

would be to pretend to cook using playdough. Children can make their own creations.

Playdough Recipe

1 ½ Cups of boiling water
Add food coloring to water
3 Tablespoons baby oil
Mix with 2 ½ cups of flour
½ Cup of Salt
1 Tablespoon Alum

- To strengthen fingers before they begin to cut, have your preschooler pinch clothespins around the top of a box.

- Make a collage using school glue, magazines, and paper (a paper bag will do). Your child and you can cut pictures from old magazines and glue them on the paper or paper bag. This activity helps children strengthen their hands by squeezing the glue bottle and using the scissors helps them gain eye-hand and finger control.

- When your child shows an interest in writing, provide him/her with a large pencil (it's easier to grip). Give the child a piece of plain paper (no lined handwriting paper) so that he/she can copy words either printed on the paper or off labels from food cans or other printed materials. Remember that children will reverse their letters and write words backwards when first learning to write. Let them experiment and praise their efforts.

Communication

- Gather up the family photo albums and look at the photos together. Talk about what happened in the photo, and try to recall a story about the event.

- Go on a nature walk and talk about the different cloud formations, plants, rocks, and animals you see during your walk. Look at the signs around your neighborhood and when you're driving in your vehicle. Read the signs and help your child to recognize their names (i.e. stop sign, gas station, McDonald's).

- Dictate a story that your child tells you, or make one up together and write it down. Be sure to print it using both upper and lowercase letters. Read the story aloud and talk about the sequence of events (what came first, next, last).

Cognitive

- To teach the skills of classification first introduce the concept of how things go together, such as there are zoo animals and farm animals. Read stories or visit a farm or the zoo. Talk about classifying clothes by season and then practice sorting clothes that your child wears in the winter when it's cold and clothes worn in the summer

when it's warm. To further reinforce classification skills, take your child shopping and/or let your child help you unpack the groceries and sort the foods into food groups - meat, vegetables, fruits, cereals, and so on.

- To introduce the concept of sink and float provide your child with toys that he/she can play with in the bathtub. Talk about what things stay on top of the water and what things go to the bottom of the tub. To extend this learning, let your child help with washing dishes (childproof ones). Talk about what happens when we place the sponge in the water. It soaks up the water and then when we squeeze the sponge, it releases the water.